RECEIVED
COLCHESTER, CT
2025 APR 10 AM 11:26
Kayla Fuerman
TOWN CLERK

**COLCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION**
**Special Meeting**

Thursday, April 10, 2025
7:30 AM
Board of Education Central Office

**MINUTES**

**BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT :** Chair Donna Antonacci, Vice-Chair Christopher Rivers, Secretary Margo Gignac, Michelle Millington, Rosemary Gignac and Stefanie Tracey-Calash.

**ADMINISTRATION PRESENT :** Superintendent Daniel P. Sullivan, III, Assistant Superintendent Jessica L. Kuckel, Bacon Academy (BA) Principal Amy Begué, William J Johnston Middle School (WJJMS) Assistant Principal Stacey Ewings.

**OTHERS PRESENT :** Director of Finance and Operations Rachel Linkkila, Instructional Technology Coordinator Barbara Johnson, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent Alyssa Fratoni, Director of Educational Operations Andrew Barillari.

1. **MEETING OPENING**
   1.1. Call to Order
   Chair Antonacci called the meeting to order at 7:32 AM

   1.2 Roll Call
   M.Gignac, R.Gignac and D.Antonacci present in person.
   C.Rivers, M.Millington and S.Tracey-Calash present via Zoom.
   A.Oliphant not present.

2. **PUBLIC COMMENT**
   2.1. For Public Comments, please see Bylaw on Meeting Conduct
- Samuel Norman, Teachers Union President
  - Reiterated his letter that was sent to the Board of Finance stating that taking away an Administrator at BA would be disastrous.
- Stacy Ewings, WJJMS Assistant Principal
  - Stated that increasing class sizes would be detrimental to classrooms. She stated that class sizes are already in the 18-22 range and it would not be good to increase it more.

3. ***DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION**
   3.1. *Possible Revisions to Board of Education Budget

BA Principal Begué expressed deep concern about the proposed cuts, emphasizing that the district's excellence stems from its robust programs and coursework, which are now at risk. She outlined the extensive responsibilities already carried by Assistant Principals, with IEP/504 meetings, MTSS, and support for students and families, warning that cuts would severely limit their ability to perform their duties.

C.Rivers stated that if they believed operations could continue with fewer resources, they wouldn't have made the initial budget request. He suggested asking the administration for a prioritized list of items to cut.

M.Gignac voiced her disappointment, noting a repeated history and questioning the misunderstanding of the detailed budget, stressing the snowball effect on secretarial workload.

Superintendent Sullivan reviewed the potential cuts and their impacts.

C.Rivers categorized the budget into three buckets: hiring at lower salaries and insurance adjustments; administrative changes; and student-impacting cuts.

M.Gignac emphasized learning from past mistakes but left that judgment to the Board of Finance and the public.

M.Millington echoed the frustration, reiterating that the current requests still fall short of meeting students' needs and risk compromising educational quality. The presentation included scenarios for $500k, $750k, and $1.25M in cuts.

Concerns around cutting the middle school team model were raised, particularly by WJ Teacher DJ Kelly, Teachers Union Representative, who warned it would damage morale, limit teacher-student relationships, and increase class sizes close to contractual limits of 30 students. Reducing guidance staff at WJ and BA would severely affect mental health services for grades 6–12.

S.Tracey-Calash questioned if removing a team from 8th grade would create inconsistencies in student experience and suggested considering a cut at 6th grade instead. She highlighted the critical role teams and specialized teaching play in student success and IEP/504 support.

C.Rivers sought clarity on operational budget items, specifically around the maintainer and the health reserve account. It was clarified that savings from the maintainer were hard to calculate and that the health reserve was too weak to qualify for collaborative insurance, making it a potential area for cuts.

M.Millington strongly opposed the idea of 30-student classrooms, calling it unsustainable and a threat to both student and staff mental health. She suggested reviewing 12-month positions, with discussions around possibly shifting some clerical roles to 10-month terms and reducing central office staffing in summer.

M.Millington left the meeting at 8:31 AM.

M.Gignac reiterated that staff reductions increase the burden on remaining employees.

D.Antonacci asked Principal Begué to speak to her building's specific impacts. Principal Begué explained that the social worker supports the most vulnerable students, and cuts would reduce services for others. She also noted the ongoing Office Professional vacancy and the challenge of shifting that role to 10 months. Currently, an office professional is handling dual responsibilities, and the summer months are critical for ordering and preparations.

It was asked that a prioritized list of budget cuts be compiled for review of the Board of Education so that a decision can be made at the Special Meeting on April 21, 2025, prior to the Public Hearing.

4. **ADJOURNMENT**

**Motion by:** M.Gignac
Motion to adjourn.
**Second:** R.Gignac
**Roll Call:** All present in favor
**Vote:** Motion carried

Chair Antonacci adjourned the meeting at 8:45 AM

Respectfully submitted,

Alyssa Fratoni
Executive Assistant to the Superintendent